

# Destinations

# CENTRAL COAST

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## Free fun in the sun at SeaWorld

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**T**his trip to SeaWorld Adventure Park in San Diego brought my family full circle in eight months. This was our second family visit to the theme park built around Shamu the killer whale and friends.

The first visit was a week prior to saying goodbye to my husband for what we thought then would be three months. It was a good send off—our last family trip together for a while.

My then nearly two-year-old, was quite enthralled with Shamu so I was anxious to see what he would be like this time around. His brother was a mere three months old and not really into the whole deal, so I was sure I would see some reaction during this next trip.

My husband and I started planning our “reunion” trip as soon as we found out when he was coming home, so it didn’t leave us much time as his return date juggled quite a bit in the end.

Once we had the dates nailed down, we prepared for our trip to both SeaWorld and the World Famous San Diego Zoo. (entrance to the zoo is free to military in uniform only).

SeaWorld is owned by Anheuser-Busch, and as part of their Operation Salute, entrance for all military is free for the active-duty members and up to four dependents.

One of the nice things about this program is that if the active duty spouse has not returned



PHOTO BY MAJ. PETER BAKO

### Zachary Bako, 2, watches the penguins play at SeaWorld.

from deployment or cannot make it, they don’t have to be present for the member’s four direct dependents to receive the free admission.

When a normal adult ticket costs \$44.95 and children ages three to nine are \$31.95, this program presents significant savings to military families.

As with most things military, there is some paperwork involved, but you can complete it at the ticket booth, or to move things along, you can point your web browser to [www.seaworld.com](http://www.seaworld.com) and print out a form early. Take the completed form and your identification cards to ticket windows and you should be good to go.

Because we got in for free, we thought it would be nice for the kids to see the killer whales up close. The park offers a program called “Dine with Shamu” where you can have lunch with the famous killer whale and family. They also offer a “Breakfast with

Shamu” but we opted for the later meal.

While expensive, (\$30 for adults, and \$15 for kids three through nine) it was definitely worth it. Sitting poolside, the whales, including a mother and her new baby, practiced “beaching” themselves and posing for pictures.

My now, two-and-a-half-year-old was beside himself, not to mention the menu including a feast for a child featuring macaroni and cheese, hot dogs, and special “Shamu” cookies dipped in chocolate.

The trainers are also available to answer any and all questions patrons have about the Orcas.

My now 10-month-old was a little upset the first time a full-size Orca beached himself in front of him—it was more the element of surprise as this huge creature popped out of the water—but he soon became accustomed to it. And every time the whales jumped during their show, the



PHOTO BY MAJ. STACEE BAKO

### Above: Shamu and friends beach themselves, while an excited Zachary turns away from the action. Left: Maj. Stacey Bako spends time with Zachary and Hayden while watching the penguins at SeaWorld.

baby laughed, clapped and declared “Bah!” Clearly, he enjoyed it!

For those who have never been, SeaWorld offers a little bit of something for everyone. There are rides for the bigger kids, Shamu’s Happy Harbor for the little ones and the young at heart, as well as pet shows, sea lion shows, and wonderful exhibits with sharks, penguins, polar bears, beluga whales and dolphins to name a few.

The park also offers a Dolphin Interaction Program where

patrons can swim with the dolphins, but participants must be at least six years old and taller than 44 inches.

Park literature states they are committed to conservation, education and research and with every visit, patrons support wildlife conservation around the world and they certainly deliver with a variety of shows and events to keep your family busy all day.

The park’s opening hours vary, but tend to run from 9 a.m.



PHOTO BY MAJ. PETER BAKO

to 11 p.m. through August and then from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. starting in September. Visit the web site for exact times of the days you want to visit.

The SeaWorld Operation Salute offer is good through Veteran’s Day 2003. Call the Anheuser-Busch Call Center at 1-800-DIAL-BUD for more information.